

SEDAR

SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Caribbean Fishery Management Council
NOAA Fisheries
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

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SEDAR Steering Committee

May 18, 2009

Boston, MA

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1. Introduction and Opening Remarks

The meeting convened at 9:00 am Monday, May 18, 2009 by Chair Ponwith. Attending members: Bonnie Ponwith, Roy Crabtree, Larry Simpson, Vince O'Shea, Steve Bortone, Miguel Rolon, Eugenio Pinero, Bob Mahood, and Duane Harris. Others attending: John Carmichael, Rachael Lindsay, and Karyl Brewster-Geisz.

2. Agenda Review

The agenda was approved without modification.

3. Approval of Minutes: May 2008 Meeting

The minutes of May 2008 were approved.

4. Update on Recent Activities

The Committee received reports on ongoing and recently completed projects.

The Committee requested that recommendations of the first 3 procedural workshops that affect the SEDAR process be brought before the committee for review and approval.

5. Proposed SEDAR Procedural Changes

The Committee reviewed proposed changes in the SEDAR process as described in document 2. Discussion on this topic began with a general overview of current challenges, summarized below.

Improved Documentation: The Committee agreed that documentation of critical decisions should be improved through all phases of the process. In particular, greater attention should be devoted to acknowledging the full range of alternatives considered and the justification (or "why") for decisions and recommendations.

Increased Output: The Committee agreed that the number of assessments produced through SEDAR must increase to meet the demands of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act and to reduce the time between assessments of individual stocks.

Broader Review and Evaluation: The Committee discussed the need to expand the scope and timeliness of assessment comments. It was noted that concerns regarding assessment methods,

input data, and decisions continue to be raised following the peer review, and in some cases legitimate concerns have been identified well after the review concluded.

Role of SSC Review: SEDAR essentially provides two reviews of the assessment, with the first being that of the independent peer review panel and the second occurring when the SSC is presented the assessment. Despite efforts to clarify the extent of the SSC's review of a peer-reviewed SEDAR assessment, some confusion still exists at the SSC level with regard to the SSC's role.

Time Lag between Assessment Review and Council Action: Councils will require more timely information as they move into the annual regulatory process of ACL's and AM's as mandated in the reauthorized MSA. However, the current staggering of SEDAR benchmark projects over the calendar year results in some assessments reaching the Councils when the terminal data are nearly 2 years prior. The Steering Committee agreed that procedural changes that reduce the delay between terminal data years and management actions should be considered.

The Committee next discussed changes to the SEDAR process that could address the issues noted. Foremost among the changes considered are modifying the planning approach to conduct updates and benchmarks in alternating years, grouping stocks into a single annual SEDAR project addressing multiple assessments to reduce the total number of workshops required, establishing fixed workshop scheduling, modifying the assessment workshop so it occurs over 4-6 weeks and meets through conference calls and webinars, implementing a broad pre-review comment period for draft assessments, and combining the current SEDAR peer review and SSC review into a single event.

Modified SEDAR Process:

1. Data Workshop

A single data workshop will be held annually, in late-March to early-April, that will focus on reviewing available datasets, identifying data that are adequately reliable for use in assessment modeling, and developing guidance for data treatments necessary to support assessment modeling. Up to 4 stocks will be included for each benchmark project, providing increased assessment productivity through fewer workshops.

The data panel will produce a data workshop report within 2 weeks of conclusion of the workshop that details their deliberations and recommendations, but will not necessarily include final input data summaries. The data workshop will no longer be expected to produce a complete dataset upon conclusion. Instead, recommendations of the data workshop will be addressed over several weeks and a complete dataset, including all data through the prior calendar year, will be made available by June 1. This will ensure that the most recent data available are included in each assessment. The data workshop panel will meet through conference call and webinar as needed to complete the final dataset. The data compiler for each stock, normally an employee of the lead assessment agency, will be responsible for collecting final data submissions, developing a report appendix which provides tables of the final dataset, and developing an input data spreadsheet.

An assessment workgroup will be added to the data workshop. This group will be responsible for considering assessment methods that are appropriate for the available data, recommending models for development during the assessment workshop, identifying input data decisions and treatments required to implement the recommended models, and developing a list of sensitivities

to be developed for each model. The group will also work with the other data workshop groups to ensure data are compiled in a manner that is appropriate for the recommended assessment models.

Data workshop participants will be similar to those currently recommended. Additional participants familiar with assessment techniques will be required to populate the assessment workgroup, and lead population analysts should not be expected to serve as data workgroup leaders to facilitate their participation in the assessment workgroup. A CIE representative will be requested to participate through the whole process, including the data and assessment workshops and the final review.

2. Assessment Workshop

The assessment workshop will become an extended process, occurring between June 1 and July 15, with the panel meeting regularly via pre-scheduled conference call and webinar. Participation will be similar to current panels with the addition of a CIE representative.

The Steering Committee supports this change as a way of increasing accessibility to the assessment deliberations and allotting adequate time to the assessment process to ensure that all reasonable analyses can be fully explored. The committee discussed the difficulties in securing assessment workshop participants, especially those who represent constituent groups and assessment experts outside the assessment agencies. A recent example of SEDAR 19 was cited, where several fishery representatives appointed by SAFMC in December have indicated they cannot attend due to other obligations. Past experience indicates few fishery representatives have the time to attend, even when expenses are reimbursed, and even fewer have the time and financial resources to attend on their own as observers. The Committee was also briefed on the inability of most assessment workshops to develop final model runs in the time allotted. This is typically due to delays in beginning modeling tied to data delays, which may be rectified by the minor modifications to the data workshop, and to identification of issues that the panel believes deserve attention but require more time than is available in the week-long workshop.

Meetings of the extended assessment workshop will be scheduled in advance and will ideally occur weekly, on the same day and at the same time throughout the workshop period. Meetings will be posted in the Federal Register and open to the public. Although only members of the panel will be allowed to speak during the calls and webinars, public comment will be accepted in writing, through letters or emails to the SEDAR Coordinator, and received comments will be made available to panel members for consideration at the next scheduled meeting. SEDAR Coordinators will host and chair the meetings. Each lead analyst or their designee will give a progress report on their assigned assessment and models, including presentations of current findings and ongoing issues. Materials for discussion will be distributed to panel members prior to each meeting.

The lead analyst for each model and stock will be responsible for preparing an assessment report that documents model inputs, configuration, results, and discussion points raised during the workshop. It is envisioned that this will improve the quality of documentation by placing primary responsibility with the professional assessment analysts who are most well versed in assessment methods and issues and who can best understand the issues that are raised. Lead analysts may be supported in this task by other analysts and members of the panel who are identified as the assessment team for the stock, and by the SEDAR Coordinator who will provide a listing of comments received and issues raised during meetings. The assessment panel

will select a preferred model configuration, recommend reference point values, and provide preliminary stock status determinations.

3. Pre-Review Comment Period

A new review step will be added, consisting of an open public comment period designed to make draft reports available to a broad audience to increase the range of review comments received. The Steering Committee discussed recent assessments where additional sensitivities and evaluations were identified late in the process, often after the review panel and SSC discussed the assessment, by individuals who did not participate in assessment development at any stage. It was recognized that the current process does not provide wide distribution of draft reports, and draft reports that do not indicate stock status seldom generate adequate attention. In reality, many of those involved in the fisheries do not take notice of an assessment until a determination of overfishing or overfished is made and additional regulations are considered. Combining a broad and open pre-review comment period with a draft report containing preliminary status determinations may compel greater comment from a broader audience.

The foundation of this review will be notification of availability in the Federal Register on or around August 1 with an open comment period of approximately 30 days (NOTE: The length of the comment period will be finalized pending review of legal requirements). Councils may also distribute the report for comment via means of their choosing. The Steering Committee also discussed requesting an independent written review of the pre-review draft by 1-2 CIE representatives. An open webinar will be held to present the assessment to those interested. This will be a formal presentation by the analysts of the assessment data, methods, and findings. No questions will be taken during the presentation, as any questions and comments should be made as part of the formal comment process.

Comments will be tabulated as they are received so that efforts may begin promptly to address any errors that may be identified. Once the comment period closes, all received comments will be tabulated by designated staff, provided to the assessment panel for review and consideration, and a summary will be included in the assessment documentation.

4. Assessment Workshop II

The assessment panel will following the pre-review to address submitted comments. They will first meet via webinar in late September to early October to review the tabulated comments and develop a statement of work to address the comments and develop any model changes or further sensitivities that may be required. The analytical team will then complete the required work, update and append the report as necessary, and provide a final draft to the assessment panel for review by November 1. The assessment panel will then hold a final webinar by mid-November to finalize their recommendations and approve the peer review draft of the assessment reports.

5. Final Peer Review

The final component will be a peer review that essentially combines the independent panel review and the SSC review. Combining both stages will reduce the confusion that currently exists over the nature of the SSC's review of a peer reviewed assessment, allow all SSC members to observe the peer review, and reduce the lag induced by the current two-step review. This review will occur in late January to early February so that the final results are available to the Councils for their March or April meetings. This will provide the Council's with assessment results based on terminal data just over 1 year prior.

This review will be held as part of an SSC meeting so that the entire SSC may observe the review activities, and may require that the Councils adjust their SSC meeting schedules and plan the SSC meeting well enough in advance to secure reviewers and provide federal register notification of the review dates along with other SEDAR activities. A review panel having membership similar to the current SEDAR peer review will be convened to conduct the review. Two representatives of the CIE will be included, with one being the representative who participated in the data and assessment components and therefore familiar with the assessment, and the other a reviewer independent of the prior activities. The Council may also chose to appoint an independent reviewer as described in the current guidelines. The Council should also identify 1 – 2 SSC members to serve as reviewers and SSC leads for each assessment presented. These leads will be responsible for ensuring the SSC discussion is reflected in the review report. The review may be chaired by the SSC chair or by a designated outside chair.

The review panel will be responsible for reviewing the assessment using Terms of Reference similar to those currently in effect. The panel will be asked to accept or reject the assessment, recommend reference point values, and provide determinations of stock status. As with the current process, the review panel will be given leeway to adopt a baseline from among the sensitivity analyses if they believe there is a more appropriate run than the one chosen by the assessment panel. The panel will work with the SSC to develop a written list of any additional sensitivity analyses or projection scenarios. Such additional analyses will be documented in a report to the SSC that will become an appendix to the SEDAR assessment report. The panel report will be completed within 2 weeks of the conclusion of the review.

6. *Schedule Review*

The Steering Committee supported the proposal to schedule assessments based on holding benchmark and update projects in alternating years with the two primary SEFSC groups operating out of phase. This allows SEDAR to conduct a benchmark project and an update project each year, and combines benchmarks and updates by area to reduce the number of workshops required. Table 1 provides an overview of the scheduling approach and includes recommended species for 2010-2015. Some phasing-in of the new scheduling approach is necessary over the next several years to accommodate currently scheduled projects.

Scheduled assessments in Table 1 and the overall workload is considered preliminary, pending review by SEFSC staff to prevent personnel conflicts and to determine whether the overall workload is manageable given current staffing levels. The familiar SEDAR planning schedule will be revised and distributed once the schedule is finalized and the feasible workload determined.

The Committee did not support the proposal by the SAFMC SSC to develop rapid assessments of the unassessed South Atlantic stocks by Spring 2010. The Committee felt it important to focus on keeping the current benchmark-assessed stocks up-to-date by focusing on South Atlantic updates in 2010. The SEFSC is working with NMFS headquarters to try and secure additional assessment resources in the short term to help meet reauthorized MSA mandates.

The Caribbean region will be treated as a separate item through SEDAR and the SEFSC over the next several years. The Committee agreed to support an additional data workshop in the Caribbean in 2010 to build in the work of the Caribbean Data Procedural workshop held in

January 2009. In addition, the Caribbean Team of the SEFSC will continue to work with the Council and SSC to develop monitoring programs and assessment techniques that accommodate available data.

The Committee discussed the differences between benchmark and update assessment, with attention devoted to identifying criteria that would justify conducting a new benchmark. It was agreed that every stock should go through a benchmark when first brought to SEDAR. Thereafter, updates will be conducted regularly to ensure changes in the population, management and fisheries are evaluated. New benchmarks will be considered when additional datasets become available, new modeling techniques are developed, or when those involved in an update recommend that a benchmark is required.

Shark assessments requested through HMS will also fall into a separate planning category. These assessments will require funding through HMS or another source separate from the current SEDAR funding process and will be scheduled as necessary. Ideally, future shark assessments will be scheduled during years when the Miami group is working on update assessments to allow the center the better manage the workload of the various staff who are critical to the assessment process.

7. SEDAR Guidelines Review

The committee agreed to review SEDAR guidelines through a conference call to be held in approximately 2 months to allow time for the Councils to review the new procedures and for the new procedures to be incorporated into the guidelines.

No additional information regarding inclusion of HMS into SEDAR was available at the meeting, as general consul reviews of the guidelines and suggested changes are still pending. Drs. Ponwith and Crabtree requested that they be kept advise of progress on the GC review.

The Committee endorsed the suggested changes to the summary report, and commended the summary report workgroup for their efforts.

The Committee agreed that SEDAR assessment reports will be considered final once the review panel component is complete. Any subsequent revisions and analyses will be documented through the Council's administrative records procedures, and any reports received by the Councils and SSCs should be forwarded to SEDAR staff.

The Committee supported development of an FTP site through SAFMC for use during SEDAR workshops.

8. Other Issues

a. Webcasting workshops

The Committee recognized the concerns raised by recent workshop participants over webcasting of meetings. However, SEDAR workshops are open to the public and public participants may further broadcast them if desired. Such private broadcasters must rely on their own equipment exclusively and will not be given access to the equipment used to generate the official workshop recordings

b. GMFMC SSC Review Panel recommendation

The modified process described above will bring the entire SSC into the SEDAR peer review component. This will address the SSC's request to increase the number of SSC members on the review panel.

c. GMFMC SSC Request to comment on benchmark vs. update assessments

The Committee encourages input from the SSCs regarding the need to conduct benchmark and update assessments and the type of assessment that is most appropriate for a given stock. It is recommended that SSCs review the SEDAR schedule during their first meeting of the year, when they will participate in a SEDAR review of benchmark or update assessments, and develop recommendations for forwarding to their Council's SEDAR committee at the next Council meeting.

d. SAFMC SEDAR 19 Participant request

The request to appoint someone familiar with the GOM red grouper assessment to the assessment panel for SA red grouper was provided to the SEFSC director.

9. Future Procedural Workshops

The committee agreed that the three procedural workshops were effective and that similar workshops should be held to address other issues that affect multiple assessments. Continuing to address such global issues is recognized as an important to continuing improvements in efficiency and quality.

The committee recommended that a procedural workshop be held in Fall 2009. SEDAR staff was directed to work with the assessment teams to decide the specific topic and develop a timeline. Two topics are proposed: 1) methods for addressing and reporting risk and uncertainty, and 2) methods of evaluating historical datasets and extending input datasets back in time.

Due to the assessment workload, no procedural workshops will be held in 2010.

10. Regional Management Coordination

This topic was not discussed due to time constraints.

11. Budget Update

Bob Mahood provided an overview of the CY 2009 budget and briefed the committee on the budget development process.

12. Next Meeting

The committee will meet via conference call in approximately 2 months. Topics to discuss will include: 1) reviewing updated SEDAR guidelines; 2) update on HMS process, 3) review Council comments on the procedural modifications, 4) finalize 2010-2015 schedule.

The committee will meet in 2010 in conjunction with the CCC meeting.

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Table 1. Proposed SEDAR Benchmark and Update Projects, 2010-2015.

Group	Beaufort	Miami			Others
Team	SAFMC	GMFMC	CFMC	Shark	
2009	B: black grouper B: red grouper	U: gag U: red grouper U: red snapper	Ongoing Data Review, Monitoring Plan development, Data-poor methods development. With CFMC and SSC.		B: ASMFC red drum
2010	U: sea bass U: snowy grouper U: tilefish U: Red Snapper	B: yellowedge B: tilefish U: Amberjack		B: TBD	R: ATL Menhaden U: FL: Spiny Lobster
2011	B: speckled hind B: Warsaw grouper <i>B: Yellowtail (FL FWC)</i> U: gag	U: vermilion U: gray trigger <i>B: Yellowtail (FL FWC)</i>			R: GOM Menhaden B: FL FWC: YTS
2012	U: red porgy U: vermilion U: GAJ U: SA Spanish	B: CMP stocks (Cobia, Little Tunny, cero, Gulf Spanish) U: King Mackerel,		B: TBD	
2013	B: White Grunt B: Scamp <i>B: (Hogfish)</i> B: Wreckfish	U: Red Snapper (?) U: Gag U: red grouper <i>B: FL Hogfish</i>			FL FWC: Hogfish ?
2014	U: black, U: red grouper U: red snapper	B: Goliath (Red Snapper Benchmark needed?)		TBD	FL FWC : Goliath?
2015	B: Dolphin B: Golden Crab (?) B:	U: yellowedge U: tilefish U: Amberjack			U: ASMFC red drum